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Atari Online News, Etc.
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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"

Well, it's mid-November already. The trees are close to bare, but my yard doesn't quite match yet. I figure one more weekend and I'll have another year's worth of foliage cleaned up. I may yet get to put my flooring down in our two new rooms before the first real good freeze and snowfall!

I don't know about you, but I'm getting quite sick of hearing about how focused Microsoft is about Windows security while in the same breath we keep learning about more and more "critical" flaws somewhere within the operating system. For a company as rich with cash and programming talent, you'd think that they would be able to get it right quickly. It's no wonder that many longtime PC users have a disdain for Microsoft!

Well, I'm not going to let myself get riled up in that debate. I'll let this week's soapbox go unused for another week, and get right into this week's issue.

Until next time...

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CaSTaway/Palm Atari ST Emulator

An alpha version of the CaSTaway Atari ST emulator has been released for the Palm PDA platform. CaSTaway/Palm is a port of the CaSTaway/GP32, which in turn was derived from CastCE. Now Atari ST fans have yet another way to play the many great Atari ST games on the go!

http://www.codejedi.com/shadowplan/castaway.html

You'll probably also want to check out the Codejedi MessageBoard for more detailed information.

http://shadow.skeleton.org/cgi-bin/mb/YaBB.cgi?board=cstsup

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Darn. I can't seem to hit the right keys today. You have no way of knowing this, but it took me almost a minute to type that first sentence. I don't know why I'm having such a hard time, but I am. I guess that's just the way it is.

I really don't have anything interesting to say this week... excluding the thing about my not being able to type, that is... but hell, everyone has an off day once in a while. I just seem to be having mine all at once. <grin>

So instead of me making believe that I've got anything cool to talk about and you making believe that you're interested in it, let's just get to the news, hints, tips and info from the UseNet, okay?

Cool. I thought you'd agree. <grin>

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup

John Garone asks about replacing hard drives:

"Can I replace my old 1 gig Seagate with new higher byte one in the same box using the same power supply? Maybe with an adaptor? (used on a Falcon)."

Jim DeClercq tells John:

"Depending on where you are, I am a pleased and satisfied customer of Black Box Corporation, in Laurance, PA, USA.

Adapters, to me, are getting hard to find, but they had them.

Phone 724-746-5500 "

John tells Jim:

"Thanks Jim, I'll give them a call.

By the way, does anyone have Best's phone # &/or a web address?"

Brian Roland supplies the requested URL:

"http://www.best-electronics-ca.com

Any drive that meets the IDE or EIDE specs can be put inside the Falcon. To make things easier on you...I'd suggest replacing the drive with one of the same physical dimensions. Falcons were built to accept a 2.5" notebook type hard drive, and later some 3rd party companies sold kits to mount and properly cable the larger foot print 3.5" drives. It sounds to me like someone has indeed upgraded this Falcon HD before, as they shipped with an 85meg 2.5" Conner drive. So.....

If you don't know what's in there...open the bird up and see for yourself, or get the drive's model number at boot time and search down a spec sheet on the web. To make it easy on yourself, order a replacement of the same physical dimensions...hence you won't have to find and change out mounting brackets and cables etc. These days, when it comes to IDE drives, there's not a whole lot of difference in price/performance between the 2.5" notebook drives and the 3.5" desk top drives. Not long ago I put a brand new 20gig IBM notebook drive in my Falcon, and it was well under $100!

You can also use external SCSI drives. Any drive that meets SCSI I or SCSI II standards should work fine. Note that most SCSI III drives and above are usually backwards compatible to the older SCSI I and II standards...it can just get kind of tricky configuring them properly. For the least hassle in addition of a SCSI drive, it's best to go with a 50 pin inline SCSI I or II device. While the wide and ultra wide SCSI units will work with adaptor plugs and whatnot...it can indeed become confusing over which adaptor will best serve your needs...I.E. some will come passive terminated on some lines, some unterminated, and so on...and which one you need can depend on all sorts of factors around how many, the order, and what type SCSI units are daisy chained together.

Finally...keep in mind that there are limits to partition sizes, and the number of partitions that TOS/GEM can see at a time...so a drive over 10 gig is going to get interesting to work with. TOS/GEM, out of the Box in a Falcon limits you to a maximum of 1gig BGM partitions. It also has a limited number of drive letters that can be assigned (I forget how many) at one time. Yes, you should be able to use every last byte of very large drives with HDDriver 8....but, when you run out of logical drive letters to assign to TOS/GEM...a huge chunk of your drive will be invisible at any given boot-up. To get at those distant partitions, you'll have to change the partition order, or temporarily disable partitions with your HD Driver software as chosen at boot time. Or....use something Like Mint with a unix style file system to make a few really huge partitions.

With that in mind...a drive over 10gig can be a bit overkill for a Falcon...but at the same time...a 20gig drive often cost less than $5 or $10 more that a 5 or 10gig unit. Go as big as you want...just don't panic or freak out when you have to be a little creative to figure out how to access the whole thing."

John tells Brian:

"well, I have 2 birds (both with no IDE drive). One is working and one is in a coma! The working one has no power ps plug for an IDE. The one in a coma has an IDE power plug but I'm concerned using that one in the good bird in case it's causing problems. So I'm opting to go with a new SCSI.

so are you saying that a new 50 pin SCSI drive will directly replace

an external drive (re: external Toad shoebox type....ps/fan/CDROM/SCSI) without having to use adaptor for the original power supply, etc., in the box? I can get along with part of the drive not being used!"

Derryck Croker chimes in and asks John:

"I'm confused - the standard Falcon setup has a single 40way ribbon cable to connect to the IDE drive and power is supplied down this?

Are you trying to fit a 3.5" drive?

I'd try the lead you have from the dead Falcon if I was in your shoes!"

John tells Derryck:

"no. I was saying that the Falcon that works has a power supply with no IDE power plug. The Falcon that doesn't work has a power supply with an IDE power plug (I'm assuming that's what it's for). Neither Falcons have an IDE drive!

I'd like to replace the external SCSI Seagate 1 gig (swap it out with a higher byte drive) and hopefully use the existing external power supply to the 1 gig.

I considered trying the other lead, but since there's problems with the bad Falcon I don't know how good it's power supply is (could even be causing problems)!

I haven't bought an IDE nor an SCSI yet until I'm confident I'm doing the right thing."

Greg Goodwin adds:

"If you have an external CD and HD shoebox, just replace the current drive with another SCSI drive. Watch that you match termination and ID of the current drive, and also realize that you have to partition larger drives. Most SCSI drives should work (at least in theory), although you will likely have to get an adapter to match your 50 pin cable."

Carey Christenson tells John:

"The IDE ribbon cable that is inside the Falcon is a 44 pin NOTEBOOK style. POWER is supplied down one of those pins along with a ground wire as well. So that ribbon cable houses power for a NOTEBOOK hard drive. This however will not work on a 3.5 inch hard drive that are much cheaper and larger in data size compared to notebook hard drives of the same cost. What I would suggest is a small adapter from Best Electronics that allow 2 3.5 in hard drives or any combination of 2.5 and 3.5 inch hard drives. JDR has a adapter as well that will take the 44 pins on your Falcon MOBO to a 40 pin IDE and give you the 2 power wires (RED and BLACK wire each) from that 44 pin if you wish to use it right from the Falcon MOBO. If you need more

information just contact me via e-mail and I will dig up my old receipts. It is very likely that one of those falcons IDE chain works just fine. I have never heard of a falcon blowing the IDE chain but still be able to use scsi devices. The other alternative is that IDE to SCSI adapter that a previous poster showed. I had never heard of such an adapter. Nice to see that some people are willing to try anything to get more devices attached to there computers."

’Xamalek’ asks:

"I always wondered ... where are the following people now?

1. Eric Smith

2. Jeff Minter

3. Dave Small

4. Bill Rehbock

5. Martin Brennan

6. John Mathieson "

Stephen Moss tells Xamalek:

"Well I don’t know about the others, but after the fall of Atari Jeff Minter started programming for the Nuon but I can’t remember what the company was called. When that all collapsed he apparently became fed up of developing for small niche systems and moved over to programming for the PC and PDA.

He was meant to visit the JagFest UK earlier this year but did not make it for some reason you can probably find out more at his web site... www.llamasoft.co.uk"

Greg Goodwin adds:

"Eric Smith: I don’t know. He posted a year or so ago, surprised that MiNT was

still carrying on, but I can’t find the post.

Jeff Minter: He’s gotten a bit too strange for me, so I don’t read his website anymore. Try searching under "Llamagames"

Dave Small: I don’t know. He posted a very long post a couple of years ago explaining what had happened to his business (legal bills killed it, as well as his marriage), but he said life was treating him well and he was spending time with his son (sons?). I think he was living in Colorado.

Bill Rehbock: Director of developer relations at NVIDIA, I think. Anyhow, the interview style is consistent.

John Mathieson: As of August 2002, John also worked for NVIDIA. I do not

know what his job description was/is."

Well folks, that’s it for this week. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week’s Gaming Section - Lawsuit Over Grand Theft Auto!
"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""" LOTR: Return of King Praised!

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->A-ONE’s Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

AP Praises ’King’ in Video Game Review

The trouble with the video game version of "The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King" is that it’s too hard to conquer but too cool to quit playing.

Like its predecessor, "The Two Towers," this sword-and-sorcery fighting adventure fuses footage of the still-unspooling movie trilogy with first-rate digital brawling.

To get to the clips, you have to beat the orcs - and the orcs don’t make it easy, ganging up on the heroes in ways movie villains (who usually attack one at a time) never do.

The characters earn points by killing as many orcs as possible without absorbing any damage, and those points can be spent at each level on new attack moves. Push a sequence of buttons and Aragorn spins, kicks, slashes and kills in one fluid move.

But there’s a catch ... While Aragorn is doing that fancy move to finish off one enemy, five others run up to pulverize him, making the elaborate gesture more of a liability than a help.

You’re better off just doing simple slashes at the orcs like they were a field of unwieldy brush. But then, that gets boring and soon you’re trying another ballet-style attack, getting your butt kicked, and having to start the level over again.

Even on the "easy" level, "Return of the King" is frustratingly difficult in ways "The Two Towers" never was. But one benefit over last year’s game is a wider range of playable characters.

In the previous title, players could manipulate only three major warriors - the human ranger Aragorn, the lithe elf Legolas and the stocky dwarf Gimli - but the developers have wisely added the wizard Gandalf and the hobbits Frodo and Sam to the repertoire. All of them are voiced by the actual movie stars, including Viggo Mortensen, Elijah Wood and Ian McKellen.

There are also three ways to reach the end of the game, following the wizard’s route, the warriors’ route, and the hobbits’ path - so after you get tired of losing as Gandalf, you can try losing as Frodo.

J.R.R. Tolkien’s world - as envisioned by the Peter Jackson movies - is beautifully rendered in digital form. The highlight is the "Gates of Minias Tirith" level, in which Gandalf must slay orcs and kick down their ladders as the monster army attacks a sovereign kingdom. Another excellent level is the Paths of the Dead, in which Aragorn, Legolas or Gimli explore some creepy caves inhabited by glowing, blue ghosts who possess piles of skeletons in the shadows.

Although the extreme difficulty of conquering each level saps some of the fun, this is a game that’s worth the effort.

"The Return of the King," released by Electronic Arts, is available on PC, Xbox, GameCube and PlayStation 2 formats. Prices start at about $40 for the PC version.

Three stars out of four.

’Grand Theft Auto’ Makers Fight Lawsuit

The creators of the video game series "Grand Theft Auto" want a federal judge to dismiss a $246 million lawsuit filed by the families of two people shot by teenagers.

Rockstar Games and its New York City-based parent, Take-Two Interactive Software, said the victims’ families were trying to hold them liable "based on the expressive content of the video game."

Retailer Wal-Mart and marketer Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc., are also named in the lawsuit.

Aaron Hamel, 45, was killed and Kimberly Bede, 19, was seriously wounded when their cars were hit June 25 by .22-caliber bullets while driving along Interstate 40.

Stepbrothers William Buckner, 16, and Joshua Buckner, 14, were sentenced in August to an indefinite term after pleading guilty in juvenile court to reckless homicide, endangerment and assault.

The boys told investigators they got the rifles from a locked room in their home and decided to randomly shoot at tractor-trailer rigs, just like in the video game "Grand Theft Auto III."

Responding Oct. 29 in U.S. District Court, Rockstar and Take-Two contend that such ideas and concepts as well as the "purported psychological effects" on the Buckners are protected by the First Amendment’s free-speech clause.

A lawyer who represents the victims dismissed the claim, saying he would seek to move the case back into state court for consideration under Tennessee’s consumer protection act.

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A-ONE’s Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Logjam In The Senate Over Web Taxes

The renewal of the ban on Internet taxes, once considered to be a given in Congress, is suddenly mired in a logjam, as U. S. Senators who had previously served as governors in their home states are holding up the legislation that would extend the ban.

Led by Senators Lamar Alexander (R-Tenn.) and George Voinovich (R-Ohio), the legislation is increasingly complicated by a host of new issues, including the tax status of VoIP. States and local governments - already under budgetary pressure at home - generally want to tax as much Internet business as they can. And, under additional stress over the loss of telephone taxes due to the growth of Internet telephoning, the once-simple issue of Web tax is beginning to resemble the proverbial can of worms.

"Virtually all of us [Senators] are willing to keep state and local governments from taxing Internet access," said Alexander in a statement. "The second principle is we don’t want unfunded federal mandates... . We want to make sure states don’t lose the bulk of their telecommunications revenues."

On the other side of the debate are Senator Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) and George Allen (R-Va.), who say legislation they have sponsored seeks to clarify what should - or shouldn’t - be taxed. Wyden has accused states of wanting to tax all Internet traffic including email. "You’ve got mail," he said, will become, "you’ve got taxes."

As the issue became polarized in recent days, the debating senators met over the weekend and are continuing to meet this week, in an effort to reach a workable compromise. The legislation expired Nov. 1. The Multistate Tax Commission, a lobbying organization, claims states will lose billions of dollars in tax revenue if the tax ban is continued.

A few states that began taxing Internet access providers before the initial ban was passed five years ago are lobbying to continue taxing. The states currently taxing Web access are Hawaii, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin.

Lurking behind the debate is the whole issue of Internet telephone taxation by states, which currently derive substantial revenues by taxing telephone service. However, a federal judge in Minnesota last month ruled that phoning on the Web-VoIP - was an Internet data service and, as such, could not be taxed by the state. Since the ruling - although it isn't likely to be the last word on the issue - regional telephone companies and assorted VoIP firms have rushed to expand their Web-telephoning business.

Several Senators have also said they want to clarify the definition of "Internet access" to make it clear exactly what should be taxed. "You could see billions and billions of dollars lost," said Senator Byron Dorgan (D-N. D.) in a statement. "Definitions are everything."

Microsoft, Lindows Face Off in Court

Microsoft has asked a San Francisco court to instruct the administrator in a $1.1 billion California class-action settlement to reject claims filed through MSfreePC.com, a site run by Linux vendor Lindows.com.

Claims filed through the MSfreePC Web site do not comply with the settlement or the claims procedures, according to Microsoft. The claims are not personally signed, and they transfer the right to be paid to Lindows.com, which the settlement does not allow, Microsoft said in its court filing.

Anyone who has filed a claim through the Lindows.com service should be sent an official claim form by the claims administrator, Microsoft said.

The filing in San Francisco Superior Court last week comes after Microsoft in late September sent Lindows.com a notice demanding it take down the MSfreePC site. The site is still up and running.

Lindows.com launched MSfreePC.com in September as a way for California software buyers to get a piece of the settlement. The site offers Lindows software and Sun Microsystems' StarOffice suite in exchange for a claim and the vouchers certain software buyers are entitled to under the settlement.

Under the settlement agreement, consumers with valid claims can use their proceeds to buy a wide range of hardware or software, including the Lindows operating system, Microsoft spokesperson Stacy Drake said Monday. "We are concerned, however, that the Lindows Web site misuses the court-approved California settlement as a marketing tool for their products."

Lindows.com calls Microsoft's attempt to shutter its site a "transparent attempt" to reduce the amount of money it has to pay out, the company said in a statement Monday. Two-thirds of any unclaimed settlement vouchers will be donated to the neediest California public schools, one-third defaults back to Microsoft.

Under the settlement announced in January, those who bought Microsoft's operating system or productivity software for use in California between February 18, 1995, and December 15, 2001, can get vouchers worth between $5 and $29 depending on the product bought.

The class-action lawsuit accused Microsoft of overcharging for its software. The company has settled ten suits like it for a total of approximately $1.55 billion. Last week Microsoft announced preliminary

court approval of a settlement in North Carolina.

The official Web site for the California settlement is MicrosoftCalSettlement.com.

Subpoenas Fly in IBM-SCO Legal Battle

The SCO Group-IBM lawsuit is already a high-profile court battle, but it is becoming even more intense. Both sides have issued a raft of subpoenas requiring an extensive list of industry figures to become involved with the proceedings.

SCO has filed subpoenas naming Linux creator Linus Torvalds, the Free Software Foundation’s Richard Stallman, Open Source Development Lab head Stuart Cohen, Transmeta general counsel John Horsley, and Novell, which recently agreed to acquire SuSE Linux.

SCO issued the subpoenas to learn "how certain programs may have gone into Linux, and what these individuals’ dealings with IBM and others may have been," SCO spokesperson Blake Stowell told NewsFactor.

SCO’s subpoenas followed those sent by IBM, which were issued on October 30th. IBM fired off subpoenas to Deutsche Bank Group, BayStar Capitol, Renaissance Ventures and the Yankee Group. IBM has not said why it issued those subpoenas, but they appear to focus on organizations that have provided support for SCO or its claims.

The subpoenas are the latest twist in a legal battle SCO initiated in March. The Lindon, Utah-based company sued IBM for misappropriating source code from Unix, which SCO owns the copyright to, and incorporating it into Linux. IBM has denied this charge and filed a countersuit against SCO, claiming SCO violated a number of IBM copyrights.

IBM claims that SCO has been slow and uncooperative in response to IBM’s requests related to the case. According to court documents from early November, IBM is asking the court to compel SCO to respond to IBM’s requests with "specificity and detail."

SCO so far has listed almost 600 files in the Linux 2.4 and 2.5 kernels that it claims contain its copyrighted code, but the company has not yet provided more detail. Some court watchers say that IBM’s subpoenas are an effort to glean information that SCO has withheld.

The IBM subpoenas are a wide-ranging request for any documents pertaining to SCO or its biggest shareholder, Utah-based Canopy Group. They were sent to three financial organizations and a research firm.

BayStar Capitol, for example, recently invested US$50 million in SCO. A Deutsche Bank analyst reportedly said he saw source code from SCO’s Unix kernel duplicated in the Linux 2.4 kernel. He later issued a "buy" recommendation for SCO’s stock.

Renaissance Ventures, a venture capitol group based in Richmond, Virginia, issued a report just after the SCO suit was filed saying that the legal action was well founded. Renaissance Ventures bought SCO stock a year before the suit was filed and has bought additional shares since the lawsuit began.

Yankee Group analyst Laura DiDio has faulted IBM for not indemnifying its Linux clients against SCO's legal claims, as Hewlett-Packard has done. DiDio declined to comment to NewsFactor, noting only that "barring some kind of settlement, this is going to be protracted, hard-fought legal battle"

IBM representatives were not immediately available for comment.

"We believe the reason that IBM put out the subpoenas that they did was to intimidate," Stowell said.

"They're trying to say to the marketplace, 'If you invest in SCO, or if - as an industry analyst - you are even remotely favorable toward SCO, then we're going to serve you with a subpoena.'"

SCO alleges that IBM has been uncooperative with its discovery requests. SCO claims it has provided about one million pages of documents as part of IBM's pretrial discovery request, and that IBM has provided just 100,000 pages to SCO.

A SCO court document from early November states that IBM has listed over 7,000 witnesses who will provide testimony supportive of IBM but has not properly identified them. SCO also alleges that IBM has not, as requested, produced "all IBM contributions to Linux" or the source code to AIX, Big Blue's flavor of Unix.

SCO also has requested Linux source code and modifications made by "Open Source Development Labs, Linus Torvalds, Red Hat or any other entity." IBM has objected to this request as not related to the lawsuit.

The next court hearing is scheduled for November 21st.

Peer-to-Peer Partner Goes on the Offensive

Altnet, a partner of Kazaa peer-to-peer software vendor Sharman Networks, sent cease and desist letters to nine companies Tuesday, accusing them of improperly using Altnet's patented file-identifying technology to do such things as identify peer-to-peer copyright violators for the recording industry.

Altnet's TrueNames file-identifying technology makes it easy for file sharers to identify the files they want, but some market research and antipiracy companies have been using TrueNames to flood peer-to-peer networks with fake files or to track file downloads, said Derek Broes, Altnet's executive vice president of worldwide operations.

Some peer-to-peer software vendors have also been using TrueNames without Altnet's permission, but Altnet is negotiating TrueNames licensing with those vendors, he added. Peer-to-peer vendors would save money by licensing Altnet's patented technology instead of creating new ways to identify files, Broes said. "It would be more efficient for them to work with us and license the technology," he said.

Asked if he was trying to protect Kazaa users from lawsuits from the recording industry, Broes denied any such motivation. "Altnet's goal has always been to provide legitimate trading of files on peer-to-peer

networks," he said. "That’s the goal - the commercialization of peer-to-peer."

TrueNames is "the most efficient" way to identify files through distinguishing marks called hash marks in files, Broes said, but peer-to-peer vendors and other companies could use other methods. The companies receiving cease and desist letters should stop using TrueNames immediately, Broes said, or face legal action. "It’s a patent we have to protect," Broes added.

Altnet sent cease and desist letters to nine companies on Tuesday, including BigChampagne, MediaDefender, and Overpeer. Representatives of MediaDefender and Overpeer, both antipiracy firms, did not respond to requests for comments, but BigChampagne CEO Eric Garland denied that his company was using TrueNames.

BigChampagne is a market research company that provides the recording industry with statistics on file swapping so that music companies can see what is popular, Garland said. His company has not been hired by anyone to identify peer-to-peer users so that the recording industry can sue them, he said.

"Each and every claim [by Altnet] is absolutely false with respect to BigChampagne," Garland added. "I think this represents a fundamental misunderstanding of what our company does."

Altnet’s TrueNames technology identifies data based on the file’s content, rather than by its file name, point of origin, location, address, or other discrete piece of information that the user can easily change, according to the company, a subsidiary of Brilliant Digital Entertainment. To identify unique files on a peer-to-peer network, TrueNames assigns a unique identifier, or hash, to data, using an algorithm in a process protected by two U.S. patents. This technique enables users of the technology to track, retrieve, monitor, and charge for the distribution of content, according to the company.

Microsoft Rivals Deny Changes Would Weaken Windows

A Microsoft Corp. rival used show-and-tell to make its point on Friday that the software giant need not cripple its popular Windows operating system to comply with EU regulators’ demands, a source familiar with the case said.

The demonstration came on the last day of a three-day hearing to help the European Commission decide on charges that Microsoft abused its dominance over personal computer operating systems through Windows, found on over 90 percent of computers.

There will be no immediate results from the highly publicized but confidential hearing which followed a predictable pattern with Microsoft defending itself against competitors’ complaints about its business practices.

Eventually, European Union hearing officer Karen Williams will send her evaluation to Competition Commissioner Mario Monti who will use it to help him rule after a five-year probe.

The European Union executive is expected to decide by the end of June 2004,

but if Microsoft objects it could start a lengthy appeal to the EU’s top court in Luxembourg.

The Commission has proposed that Microsoft offer a version of Windows without Media Player audio-visual software built in, so that rivals would be on a level playing field. In particular, it focused on rivals RealNetworks Inc. RealPlayer and Apple Computer Inc.’s QuickTime.

The EU may also impose a hefty fine on Microsoft.

Microsoft argues that if it were ordered to cut out Media Player it would be forced to offer a substandard version of Windows which would be unable to run many popular programs.

Both the manner and substance of Microsoft’s warning made an out-of-court settlement seem more distant, a Microsoft critic following the case said.

"Microsoft is grateful for the opportunity to present its case to the European Commission and National Competition Authorities," the Redmond, Washington-based software maker said in a statement issued at the end of the hearing.

"In some areas we have identified opportunities to narrow the differences between us... Microsoft recognizes that as an industry leader it has a special responsibility to consumers, the industry and the Commission to work things out," Microsoft said.

RealNetworks demonstrated a version of a product known as "Windows XP Embedded" to show the operating system could work well without Windows Media Player, a source familiar with the case said.

The product seemed to work fine to many of those sitting in the hearing room, the source said.

Microsoft’s Web site says XP Embedded is software to let developers select only the features they need and is a single-purpose product used for such items as ATM cash machines.

"Microsoft does not license the embedded operating systems for use on a general purpose computer," it says on its Web site (http://www.microsoft.com/windows/Embedded/faq/default.asp).

RealNetworks also took issue with statistics offered by Microsoft to show that a number of makers of personal computers put RealPlayer on their products. RealNetworks said that the computer makers put RealPlayer on only a very tiny percentage of their products, the source said.

RealNetworks also said that the arguments and the approach used by Microsoft to help defeat it were identical to the approach used to defeat Netscape’s browser software Navigator in the 1990s, the source said.

U.S. courts found that Microsoft violated antitrust laws there, using illegal practices to favor its own Internet Explorer software.

Meanwhile in London, Microsoft’s chief executive officer for Europe, Middle East and Africa, repeated the company’s desire to settle the European Union case.

"We want to resolve this case. We want to put this behind us. That’s the purpose of the hearings this week," Jean-Philippe Courtois told journalists

on Friday on the sidelines of a new technologies seminar.

Zombie Machines Fueling New Cyber-Crime Wave

The rapid growth of broadband home computer connections may be inadvertently fueling what police suspect could be the start of a new crime wave - cyber-blackmail.

As more homes connect to faster delivery systems, their computers are becoming vulnerable to hackers and virus writers who can turn them into "zombie" machines, ready to carry out any malevolent command.

Favorite targets for the extortionists - many thought to come from Eastern Europe - have been casinos and retailers, but one recent high-profile victim was the Port of Houston.

"At the end of the day, this is old-fashioned protection racket, just using high-tech," said a spokeswoman for Britain’s Hi-Tech Crime Unit.

On Wednesday, British cyber crime cops made a plea to companies to report attacks against their Internet businesses following a recent string of incidents with the blackmailing trademark.

Police have seen an increase in the number of distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks targeting online businesses.

In some cases, the attacks, which can cripple a corporate network with a barrage of bogus data requests, are followed by a demand for money. An effective attack can knock a Web site offline for extended periods.

Online casinos appear to be a favorite target as they do brisk business and many are located in the Caribbean where investigators are poorly equipped to tackle such investigations.

In 2001, cyber forensics expert Neil Barrett told Reuters that his company, Information Risk Management, was working with Internet casinos to shore up their defenses against a spate of DDoS attacks.

At the time, he said the denial-of-service barrages were followed by demands to pay up or the attacks would continue. He said the attacks appear to have come from organized criminal groups in Eastern Europe and Russia.

Police said because of a lack of information from victimized companies, they are unsure whether these are isolated incidents or the start of a new crime wave.

Whatever the motive, DDoS attacks are on the rise, coinciding with the proliferation of broadband deployment in homes. Security experts believe the increasing number of unsecured home PCs may be a major culprit.

New Internet- and e-mail-borne computer infections are hitting home computers, turning them into zombie machines that can be controlled by outsiders without the owner’s knowledge, security experts say.

Such infected machines can be told to send e-mail spam or even be used to initiate or participate in a denial of service attack against another

computer.

"Home broadband computers are going to be the launching point for a majority of these," said Richard Starnes, director of incident response for British telecoms company Cable & Wireless and an adviser to Scotland Yard’s Computer Crime Unit.

Last week, the online payment service WorldPay admitted to suffering a major DDoS attack that lasted three days. WorldPay, owned by the Royal Bank of Scotland, has been fully restored.

The NHTCU spokeswoman said the investigation into the WorldPay incident is ongoing.

Spammers Now Clogging Blogs, Cell Phones

Spam has never been limited to e-mail. But now, commercial pitches are increasingly popping up in online chats, instant messages, cell phones with text messaging and even Web log comments.

Three years ago, Adam Kalsey set up a Web log to share his thoughts about online business and the digital revolution. Like countless other "bloggers," he lets his readers post comments on his entries.

Recently, his site has been getting remarks like "Thanks for the information!" and "Sounds great!" They’re not from supporters, but from people - or machines - who leave names like "Generic Viagra," "Online Gambling" and "Free Poker" and links to unsavory sites.

Spammers are flocking to new communications tools like moths to light, threatening to cripple these tools just as they are beginning to take off.

Howard Rheingold, a futurist who predicts always-on communication will revolutionize public discourse, is worried that all these new forms of spam could freeze the revolution in its tracks.

There will be no great social transformation if cell phones are turned off, instant messenger programs shut down or blog comments disabled to halt the flow of offers for online porn or cheap drugs.

"It forces you to either turn off the comments and lose some of the value of the medium, or spend your time deleting spam," said Rheingold, who runs his own blog.

Today, most of the attention of lawmakers has been on e-mail spam, which is estimated to comprise nearly half of e-mail traffic. Attempts to write broader laws have not succeeded, and might whittle away at free speech.

"We ought to be legislating general concepts - things like, you can’t market to somebody who’s asked you not to," said David Sorkin, a professor who studies spam laws at John Marshall Law School. "But in the case of spam in particular, that hasn’t really worked."

It’s possible legislation targeting unwanted e-mail could be used to fight other unwanted communication; text messages on cell phones often originate from e-mail. Laws limiting telemarketing also might be useful.

But that assumes the legislation will work, and that spammers won’t move outside the law.

Kalsey, a Web consultant who lives near Sacramento, Calif., has taken matters into his own hands. In fact, many of his comments of late have focused on combatting Web log spam, including the creation of a "Comment Spam Manifesto."

"What you failed to understand is that bloggers are smarter, better connected and more technologically savvy than the average e-mail user," it reads, addressing the spammers. "We control this medium that you are now attempting to exploit. You’ve picked a fight with us and it’s a fight you cannot win."

Working from the theory that blog spam can be combatted like real-world graffiti, Kalsey tried deleting messages as fast as they appeared. That worked for a few weeks but the volume has recently been increasing.

Now he’s tracking down those who leave the comments, collecting evidence and reporting them to their Internet providers and domain registers so their accounts can be canceled. If it sounds like a lot of work, it is. Fortunately, help from others is available.

"The blog immune system does seem to be responding," said Kalsey. "People are coming up with collective solutions like black lists for spammers. If one person gets spammed, then all the others who use that software can ban them."

Most of today’s comment spam doesn’t urge someone to click on the link. Rather, it’s posted to boost a site’s position on search engines. Web crawling software robots released by search engines notice keywords and links, and that information is used to determine relevancy.

Mena Trott, chief executive of Six Apart, the maker of the popular Web log system Movable Type, said the company is working on updates to make deletion of unwanted messages easier.

Cell phone carriers and providers of instant messaging services, meanwhile, are finding that their spam problems can be much more disruptive to workflow.

For IM, spam is growing just as the technology jumps from personal to business communications. To address the problem, companies are blocking messages from outsiders, instituting "white lists" of accepted contacts or not allowing IM at all.

But that’s making messaging less convenient.

"In (corporate) instant messaging, we’re doing more of a closed approach than what we were seeing with e-mail," said Paul Judge, chief technology officer of the antispam firm CipherTrust Inc. and co-chair of the Anti-Spam Research Group.

America Online, the largest instant-messaging provider, has a number of roadblocks in place to halt spam IM, or spim. Among other things, a software sentry looks for spammers - automated or in-the-flesh - who try to send multiple messages simultaneously to many people, said spokesman Nicholas Graham.

Cell phone text message spam can be even more disruptive - and expensive.

Some Nextel Communications cell phone subscribers recently got a 3:30 a.m. message urging support of the workers in the southern California grocery strike. Another spammer urged a vote in favor of recalling California Gov. Gray Davis (news - web sites).

Aside from early morning annoyance, some plans charge for each message sent or received. Nextel, which last month installed a filtering system, offers refunds to any customers who complain.

"All the carriers have been hit with situations like this," said Nextel spokeswoman Mila Fairfax. "Each carrier has applied a filtering system to try to flag messages that appear suspicious to our system."

"We will be going after (spammers) to the furthest extent of law," Fairfax said. "Anything we can do, we will do."

Government Orders Re-Examination of Net Patent

In an unusual move, the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office is reconsidering a patent affecting Internet pages that critics contend could disrupt millions of Web sites.

Citing "a substantial outcry from a widespread segment of the affected industry," deputy patent commissioner Stephen G. Kunin ordered the agency’s examiners to reconsider the patent they awarded in November 1998 to three researchers at the University of California.

Kunin described the case as "an extraordinary situation." The patent office has ordered such re-examinations only 151 times since 1981 and issues about 180,000 patents each year.

The patent - No. 5,838,906 - affects how Internet sites build into Web pages small interactive programs that power everything from banner ads to interactive customer service. Eolas Technologies Inc., which was founded by one of the inventors and has licensed the patent exclusively, has begun enforcing its claims and recently won a $520 million jury award against Microsoft Corp., which quickly appealed the judgment.

Eolas said Microsoft’s Internet Explorer Web browser software - used by the vast majority of Internet users - violated its patent. Microsoft has pledged to redesign its browser early in 2004 in ways that will require Web surfers to click on a dialogue box when they visit a site that employs one of the specialized programs.

Last month, the inventor of the World Wide Web urged the patent office to re-examine the patent’s validity. Tim Berners-Lee said he worried that Microsoft’s redesign "would render millions of Web pages and many products of independent software developers incompatible." He also feared that Web developers would respond with their own tweaks that ignore long-standing Web standards.

Kunin’s Oct. 30 order was based on claims by Berners-Lee and others that patent examiners may not have adequately considered so-called "prior art" that suggested the researchers’ ideas were not new. Kunin wrote that because of those claims, "a substantial new question of patentability exists."

A patent spokeswoman, Brigid Quinn, said the re-examination could take a year, but Eolas is permitted to enforce the disputed patent during that period. The patent office took just over four years to award the patent originally.

Price War Looms for High-Speed Net Access

The cost of high-speed home Internet access has dipped below $20 a month in some areas as cable and phone companies battle for customers.

In one of the most aggressive promotions, Comcast recently began offering high-speed cable service for $19.95 a month for 12 months to select customers in California, Illinois and Maryland. After that, the cost would more than double to standard Internet cable rates. Comcast says the promotion is aimed at winning over high-speed DSL customers.

Still, the promotion by the No. 1 broadband provider could pressure rivals - who have also sliced broadband rates several times this year - to drop them further. Last month, the best DSL, or digital subscriber line, deals nationwide ran about $26.95 a month.

"Comcast’s intent may not have been to instigate a price war, but it may as companies scramble to retain and add subscribers," says Bruce Leichtman of Leichtman Research Group.

Lower prices are helping the spread of broadband which has been held up, in part, by cost. In the past quarter, a record 2 million U.S. home users signed up for broadband service, says Leichtman. Still, an estimated two-thirds of home Internet users have the usually cheaper but slower dial-up service. Leichtman and others warn that broadband growth could slow as early-adopter ranks thin.

At $19.95, broadband would be about the same as dial-up service from an Internet service provider.

Broadband’s push into the mainstream, which really took hold this year, has sparked a wave of new content that requires high-speed delivery from the likes of ABC and Major League Baseball. More content is likely to inspire more people to buy broadband, tech analysts say. And more broadband subscribers will inspire more content.

Comcast’s promotion is targeted at select DSL users, some of whom switched to rival services. Comcast, with 4.9 million subscribers, has made similar offers in other markets. But they usually lasted three to six months. Comcast then raised monthly prices to usual rates.

"This particular campaign is a limited offer, and we anticipate it to be a one-time event," Dave Watson, a Comcast marketing executive, said in a statement.

Since spring, SBC - with 3.1 million subscribers - twice reduced its monthly DSL cost: to $29.95 from $34.95 on June 1 and to $26.95 on Oct. 1.

In May, Verizon lowered its stand-alone home DSL service to $34.95 from $49.95. Like others, Verizon is offering tiered services - just as ISPs offer different rates for dial-up and e-mail service.

While lower prices mean better deals for consumers, operators risk cutting into profits.

Senate Leader Learns Lesson in Online Activism

According to an old adage, there are no stupid questions, only stupid answers. But, as U.S. Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist may have learned this week, on the Internet it can be hard to tell which is which.

On Wednesday, Frist’s Senate Web site had posed visitors a simple, if somewhat leading, yes-or-no proposition: "Should the president’s nominees to the federal bench be allowed an up or down vote on confirmation as specified in the Constitution?"

But, with the Senate locked in a marathon debate over Democrats’ blocking of four of President Bush’s conservative judicial nominees, the question quickly set off a online political brawl marked by allegations, firmly denied, of high-tech ballot rigging in the Tennessee Republican’s office.

The online poll, a regular feature of Frist’s site, normally generates limited interest. The previous day, a question about honoring veterans drew just 35 votes.

But the nominee question was spotted by a liberal weblogger, or online diarist, known as Atrios, who linked to Frist’s site and asked his readers to weigh in. By early evening, over 9,000 people had responded, with some 60 percent voting "No."

That wasn’t lost on Democrats, who took to the Senate floor to bait Republicans. "Even the majority leader’s Web site indicates that what is going on here is absolutely wrong," said Assistant Senate Democratic Leader Harry Reid of Nevada.

On the other side of the Web’s ideological divide, however, users of a conservative Web forum, FreeRepublic.com, were also paying attention. "The poll needs our help," exhorted one poster going by the screen name outinyellowdogcountry.

Both sides quickly noted that a simple change in their computers’ settings would allow them to cast multiple votes and both, apparently, activated programs that allow for the automatic stuffing of virtual ballot boxes.

Meanwhile, according to Web records and people following the skirmish, the poll was doing some changing of its own.

-- First, temporarily daunting "No" voters, the question was flipped, to: "Should the Senate be prevented from exercising its Constitutional duty to provide the president’s judicial nominees with an up or down vote?"

-- It was soon restored to the original sense, if not wording, then reading: "Should the Senate exercise its Constitutional duty to provide the president’s judicial nominees with an up or down vote?"

-- But a few hours later, the question was again coming from the opposite tack, asking: "Should the Senate minority block the body’s Constitutional duty to provide the president’s judicial nominees with an up or down vote?"

-- Finally, late Wednesday night, with thousands of votes pouring in every minute, the poll was closed and the result recorded as: "Should the Senate perform its constitutional duty to provide the president's judicial nominees with an up or down vote. Yes: 54 percent. No: 46 percent. 106,615 votes."

Frist's spokesman, Bob Stevenson, denied on Thursday the poll had been changed to try to ensure any particular result, attributing the initial back-and-forth to efforts to foil the automatic voting programs that were being used.

"They are up there to allow people to give their honest feedback. Wherever the chips may fall, that's fine," he said.

"However, after going through last night's experience, we've recommitted ourselves to the 'Do not spam' law," he said, referring to efforts to ban automated Internet junk mail.

Sci-Fi Legend Doctor Who Zooms Into Cyberspace

For dedicated fans of the legendary science fiction hero Doctor Who, the long wait is up.

A new animated version based on the ninth incarnation of the doctor, played by Richard E. Grant, has been placed on the BBC's Internet arm BBCi and can be downloaded for viewing.

The cult series that aired from 1963-1989 to become the world's longest-running science-fiction program will return to television screens in 2005 and the cyberspace version is a way of keeping fans content until then.

The 85-minute series called "The Scream of the Shalka" also coincides with the show's 40th anniversary.

The original programs chronicled the adventures of eight doctors and their many companions who battled countless foes - human, alien and most notoriously the "Daleks" - as they traveled through time and space in a time machine disguised as a police telephone box.

Grant, the star of such films as "Withnail and I" and "Bram Stoker's Dracula" described the adventure as "Sherlock Holmes in Space."

The BBC have not announced who will play the title role in the television series but British media say Grant, Bill Nighy and Eddie Izzard are being considered.

The series can be viewed at www.bbc.co.uk/doctorwho.

California Hacker Sentenced in Al Jazeera Site Attack

A Los Angeles-area man has been fined and sentenced to community service for hacking into the Web site of satellite TV network Al Jazeera during the

U.S.-led war in Iraq and rerouting visitors to a page featuring an American flag and the motto "Let Freedom Ring."

At a sentencing hearing on Wednesday, U.S. District Judge Howard Matz told Web designer John William Racine II: "I don’t think of you as an evil person ... but this was a crime. It wasn’t just a childish prank."

Matz sentenced Racine, 24, to 1,000 hours of community service and a $2,000 fine. Racine, also known as John Buffo, vowed to the judge that he would never do such a thing again.

Prosecutors said the Qatar-based Arabic television broadcaster did not respond to U.S. government inquiries about whether the hacking caused it any financial losses.

Racine posed as an Al Jazeera employee to get a password to the network’s site, (http://www.aljazeera.net), then redirected visitors to a page he created that showed an American flag shaped like a U.S. map and the patriotic motto, court documents said.

In June, Racine pleaded guilty to wire fraud and unlawful interception of an electronic communication.

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